

MODULE 2 Formulating the Ethics Question

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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration
National Center for Ethics in Health Care

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

Handout 2.1

Examples of Values Labels and Values Descriptions

Partially excerpted from the Ethics Resource Center:
<http://www.ethics.org/resource/definitions-values>

<u>Values Label</u>	<u>Values Description</u>
Acceptance	Favorable reception or belief in something
Accomplishment	Doing or finishing something successfully
Accountability	Obligation or willingness to accept responsibility
Adaptability	The ability to modify behavior to fit changing situations
Advocacy	The act or process of pleading for or supporting an individual, group, or cause
Allegiance	Loyalty or the obligation of loyalty
Altruism	Unselfish concern for the welfare of others
Appreciation	Recognizing the quality, value, or significance of people and things
Aspiration	A strong or persistent desire for high achievement
Authenticity	The quality or condition of being trustworthy or genuine
Autonomy	The condition or quality of being independent
Beneficence	The state or quality of being kind, charitable, or doing good
Benevolence	An inclination to perform kind, charitable acts
Camaraderie	Goodwill and lighthearted rapport between or among friends
Caring	Feeling and exhibiting concern and empathy for others
Charity	Generosity toward others or toward humanity
Citizenship	Exercising the duties, rights, and privileges of being a citizen
Clear thinking	Acting intelligently without mental confusion
Collaboration	To work cooperatively especially in a joint intellectual effort
Commitment	Being bound emotionally or intellectually to a course of action or to another person or persons
Community	Sharing, participation, and fellowship with others
Compassion	Deep awareness of the suffering of others coupled with the wish to relieve it
Competence	The state or quality of being adequately or well qualified
Composure	Maintaining a tranquil or calm state of mind
Concern	Regard for or interest in someone or something
Confidentiality	Ensuring that information is accessible only to those authorized to have access
Conscientiousness	The trait of being painstaking and careful
Consideration	Process of employing continuous, careful thought, and examination
Consistency	Reliability or uniformity of successive results or events
Constancy	Steadfastness in purpose
Cooperation	The willing association and interaction of a group of people to accomplish a goal
Courage	The state or quality of mind or spirit that enables one to face danger, fear, or vicissitudes with confidence and resolution
Courtesy	Civility; consideration for others

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<u>Values Label</u>	<u>Values Description</u>
Credibility	The quality or power to elicit belief
Decency	Conformity to prevailing standards of propriety or modesty
Dedication	Selfless devotion of energy or time
Democracy	The principles of social equality and respect for the individual within a community
Dependability	The trait of being reliable
Diversity	A point of respect in which things differ; variety
Duty	A moral or legal obligation
Efficiency	The quality of producing an effect or result with a reasonable degree of effort to energy expended
Empathy	Identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives
Equality	The right of different groups of people to receive the same treatment
Equity/Equitable	The state, quality, or ideal of being just, impartial, and fair
Ethics	The way people behave based on how their beliefs about what is right and wrong influence behavior
Excellence	The state of being good to a high degree
Fairness	Consistent with rules, logic, or ethics
Faithfulness	Adhering firmly and devotedly to someone or something that elicits or demands one's fidelity
Fidelity	Faithfulness; loyalty or devotion
Forgiveness	The willingness to stop blaming or being angry with someone
Fortitude	The strength or firmness of mind that enables a person to face danger, pain or despondency with stoic resolve
Generosity	Liberality in giving or willingness to give
Genuine	Not spurious or counterfeit
Giving	Voluntarily transferring knowledge or property without receiving value in return
Goodness	Morally right, or admirable because of kind, thoughtful, or honest behavior
Goodwill	Friendly attitude in which you wish that good things happen to people
Gratitude	Feeling of thankfulness and appreciation
Helpfulness	The property of providing useful assistance or friendliness evidenced by a kindly and helpful disposition
Honesty	Fairness and straightforwardness of conduct
Honor	Principled uprightness of character; personal integrity
Hope	The feeling that something desired can be had or will happen
Humility	Feeling that you have no special importance that makes you better than others
Ingenuity	Inventive skill or imagination
Initiative	Ability to begin or to follow through energetically with a plan or task
Integrity	Strict adherence to moral values and principles
Justice	Conformity to moral rightness in action or attitude, distributing goods and treatment fairly and equitably
Kindness	The quality or state of being beneficent

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<u>Values Label</u>	<u>Values Description</u>
Legality	The quality or state of being in conformity of the law
Liberty	The right and power to act, believe, or express oneself in a manner of one's own choosing
Loyalty	A feeling or attitude of devotion, attachment and affection
Mercy	Forgiveness shown toward someone whom you have the power to punish
Moderation	Having neither too little nor too much of anything
Morals	Individual beliefs about what is right and wrong
Nonmaleficence	Doing no intentional harm
Obedience	Compliance with that which is required; subjection to rightful restraint or control
Openness	The free expression of one's true feelings and opinions
Opportunity	Favorable or advantageous circumstance or combination of circumstances
Optimism	A bright, hopeful view and expectation of the best possible outcome
Patience	The ability to accept delay, suffering, or annoyance without complaint or anger
Perseverance	Steady persistence in adhering to a course of action, a belief, or a purpose
Promise-keeping	Keeping your word that that you will certainly do something
Prudence	Doing something right because it is the right thing to do
Purity	Moral goodness
Reason	The ability to think and make good judgments
Recognition	An acceptance as true or valid
Reconciliation	Enabling 2 people or groups to adjust the way they think about divergent ideas or positions so they can accept both
Reliability	Consistent performance upon which you can depend or trust
Repentance	Remorse or contrition for past conduct
Resilience	The ability to rebound quickly from misfortune or change
Resourcefulness	The ability to act effectively or imaginatively, especially in difficult situations
Respect	Polite attitude shown toward someone or something that you consider important
Responsibility	That for which someone is responsible or answerable
Rights	That which is due to someone by just claim, legal guarantees, or moral principles
Sacredness	State of being holy or sacred; being holy or highly worth of respect
Sacrifice	To give up something for something else considered more important
Self-control	Control of personal emotions, desires, or actions by one's own will
Self-discipline	Making yourself do things when you should, even if you do not want to do them
Sensitivity	Awareness of the needs and emotions of others
Serenity	Calmness of mind and evenness of temper
Sharing	To allow others to participate in, use, enjoy, or experience jointly or in turns

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<u>Values Label</u>	<u>Values Description</u>
Sincerity	Genuineness, honesty, and freedom from duplicity
Sobriety	Habitual freedom from inordinate passion or overheated imagination; calmness; coolness; seriousness
Stewardship	The careful conducting, supervising, or managing of something
Supportive	Furnishing support or assistance
Thoughtfulness	The tendency to anticipate needs or wishes
Tolerance	Recognizing and respecting the beliefs or practices of others
Transparency	Openness, communication, and accountability in interpersonal and business interactions
Trust	Assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something
Trustworthiness	The trait of deserving confidence
Truth-telling	Telling the truth as opposed to lying
Understanding	Knowing how something works or a positive, truthful relationship between people
Values	Core beliefs that guide and motivate attitudes and actions
Virtue	Doing something right because it is the good thing to do
Wisdom	The ability to make good judgments based on what you have learned from your experience

Characteristics of a Values Perspective: Checklist

- ☐ Explicitly identifies the person or group whose perspective is being represented, i.e., who holds the perspective.
- ☐ Uses words such as “believes” or “according to...” to link the person or group to the value.
- ☐ Is normative (expressing or implying how things *should be* as opposed to how things *are*).
- ☐ Explicitly expresses an underlying value. (It may or may not include a values label.)
- ☐ Contains enough contextual information to relate the value to the specifics of the consultation.
- ☐ Does not include any names or other individual identifiers.
- ☐ Uses everyday language and avoids jargon.
- ☐ Is in the form of a sentence.



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Using Building Blocks to Formulate an Ethics Question—Worksheet

Instructions

In your small group, choose at least 2 scenarios from Scenarios 2–6 to work with. (Scenario 1 has been filled out for you as an example.) Read each scenario and list the values labels that you feel describe the scenario (use **Handout 2.1: Examples of Values Labels and Values Descriptions**, as needed). Next, write values perspectives for each values label (use **Handout 2.2: Characteristics of a Values Perspective: Checklist**). Then place checkmarks in the appropriate row in the third column to indicate the 2 values that you consider to be most central to the ethical concern. Combine these 2 values to write the ethical concern. Finally, select the appropriate form for the question and indicate the decision or action, if appropriate. Be prepared to share your ethics question.

If you have time, you can repeat the process for the remaining scenarios, or work with them later as a refresher.

Small-Group Activity

SCENARIO 1 (Example):

The chief medical resident requests an ethics consultation. She has just begun a 6-month rotation at the hospital and is upset because her attending has chastised her for allowing her resident physicians to practice procedures (central line insertions and intubation) on newly deceased patients without obtaining consent from the next of kin. The chief resident defends this practice because she sees it as an invaluable learning opportunity for the medical residents, and she is responsible for their education. Practicing procedures on newly deceased patients without consent is allowed at other affiliated hospitals where she has trained. She says it should be allowed in this hospital as well because it “is best for the most people.”

Which values are creating uncertainty or conflict in the scenario?

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central
Autonomy	The attending thinks that the family should determine what procedures are performed on their deceased relative’s body because it is their right.	✓
Community	The chief resident believes that it will be good for the community if residents are allowed to practice procedures on newly dead patients.	✓
Consistency	The attending argues that in order to be consistent, residents should ask for consent to practice on deceased patients just as they do for living patients.	
Consistency	The chief resident argues that in order to be consistent, our hospital should do what the other hospital does.	
Duty	The attending believes that the chief resident has a duty to teach residents not to practice procedures without permission	

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

The attending thinks that the family should determine what procedures are performed on their deceased relative’s body because it is their right, but the chief resident believes that it will be good for the community if residents are allowed to practice procedures on newly dead patients...

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

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If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Practice procedures on newly deceased patients without consent from the next of kin.

Be prepared to state your ethics question.

Given that the attending thinks that the family should determine what procedures are performed on their deceased relative's body because it is their right, but the chief resident believes that it will be good for the community if residents are allowed to practice procedures on newly dead patients, is it ethically justifiable to practice procedures on newly dead patients without consent from the next of kin?

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

SCENARIO 2

A dying patient's family requests that the patient's automated implantable cardioverter-defibrillator be turned off. The cardiologist refuses, commenting that this would be harmful to his patient—especially since the defibrillator has fired in response to ventricular arrhythmias 2 times over the past 3 months.

Which values are creating uncertainty or conflict in the scenario?

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Be prepared to state your ethics question.

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

SCENARIO 3

A pharmacist asks for an ethics consultation. He raises concerns about a new hospital policy that requires him to split pills to fill prescriptions for a particular medication. He recognizes that since 50- and 25-mg tablets cost the same, the system could substantially save on medication costs by providing $\frac{1}{2}$ of a 50-mg tablet rather than a 25-mg tablet. However, the tablet is not scored and thus not approved for use in this way by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Even though other hospitals split pills, the pharmacist is concerned that split pills would not necessarily contain the correct dose.

Which values are creating uncertainty or conflict in the scenario?

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Be prepared to state your ethics question.

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

SCENARIO 4

A patient, distressed by her prognosis of incurable cancer, has made multiple attempts at suicide. She tells her friends that she will try again, and they support her decision. When they do not hear from her for a few days, they ask her building's superintendent to check on her. The superintendent finds her still alive but barely breathing, and he calls 911. She is rushed to the hospital and put on a ventilator when she slips into a coma; doctors fear that she has suffered brain damage. She has an advance directive, and her health care power of attorney has asked the health care team to "finish" the suicide. Doctors have asked for an ethics consultation to consider what to do in this situation.

Which values are creating uncertainty or conflict in the scenario?

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Be prepared to state your ethics question.

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

SCENARIO 5

A workgroup convened by the chief business officer developed a new hospital policy on advertising. During the approval process, leadership referred the policy for the Ethics Consultation Service for a document review.

Which values are creating uncertainty or conflict in the scenario?

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Be prepared to state your ethics question.

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

SCENARIO 6

A 53-year-old patient has been followed in the primary care clinic for the past 3 years for his back pain. He also has a history of occasional substance abuse (cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol). His primary care provider sent him to a pain specialist for evaluation. The pain specialist recommended exercises as well as long-acting and immediate-release opioids. However, the primary care doctor refused to prescribe the recommended medications because she could not “in good conscience” risk her license by prescribing opioids to a known substance abuser. The manager of the primary care clinic has requested an ethics consultation to assist with this case.

Which values are creating uncertainty or conflict in the scenario?

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Be prepared to state your ethics question.

Handout 2.4

Using Building Blocks to Formulate an Ethics Question—Answer Key

NOTE: These “answers” are merely examples of the values that might be identified as central; in real life, the consultant would work with the requester to determine the central values perspectives.

SCENARIO 2

A dying patient’s family requests that the patient’s automated implantable cardioverter-defibrillator be turned off. The cardiologist refuses, commenting that this would be harmful to his patient—especially since the defibrillator has fired in response to ventricular arrhythmias 2 times over the past 3 months.

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central
Respect for person	The family argues the defibrillator ought to be turned off out of respect for the patient.	✓
Nonmaleficence	According to the cardiologist, turning off the defibrillator is wrong because it would harm the patient by allowing him to die.	
Nonmaleficence	The family believes it is unethical that the patient is being harmed by the ongoing shocks from the defibrillator.	
Responsibility	The cardiologist maintains that he should not turn off the defibrillator because he would feel directly responsible for the patient’s death.	✓
Mercy	As the family sees it, the defibrillator should be stopped to allow a merciful death.	

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Given that the family argues that the defibrillator ought to be turned off out of respect for the patient, but the cardiologist maintains that he should not turn off the defibrillator because he would feel directly responsible for the patient’s death...

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Refuse to turn off the defibrillator.

Be prepared to state your ethics question.

Given that the family argues that the defibrillator ought to be turned off out of respect for the patient, but the cardiologist maintains that he should not turn off the defibrillator because he would feel directly responsible for the patient’s death, is it ethically justifiable for the cardiologist to refuse to turn off the defibrillator?

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

SCENARIO 3

A pharmacist asks for an ethics consultation. He raises concerns about a new hospital policy that requires him to split pills to fill prescriptions for a particular medication. He recognizes that since 50- and 25-mg tablets cost the same, the system could substantially save on medication costs by providing ½ of a 50-mg tablet rather than a 25-mg tablet. However, the tablet is not scored and thus not approved for use in this way by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Even though other hospitals split pills, the pharmacist is concerned that split pills would not necessarily contain the correct dose.

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central
Obedience	The pharmacist believes he has a responsibility to obey FDA standards by not splitting this kind of pill.	
Quality patient care	In the pharmacist's opinion, ensuring that the patient gets the right amount of medication in each dose is essential to quality patient care.	✓
Community	The administration considers the policy defensible because this practice is common among other hospitals in the community.	
Stewardship	The administration's position is that they are being good stewards of hospital resources by requiring pharmacists to dispense split pills.	✓

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Given that, in the pharmacist's opinion, ensuring that the patient gets the right amount of medication in each dose is essential to quality patient care, but the administration's position is that they are being good stewards of hospital resources by requiring pharmacists to dispense split pills . . .

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- "Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?"
- "Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?"
- "What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?"

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Unclear. The scenario does not state whether the pharmacist is asking what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable for him to take or whether it is ethically justifiable for the hospital to require pharmacists to split pills.

Be prepared to state the ethics question.

Given that, in the pharmacist's opinion, ensuring that the patient gets the right amount of medication in each dose is essential to quality patient care, but the administration's position is that they are exercising good stewardship of the facility's resources by requiring pharmacists to dispense split pills, what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?

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SCENARIO 4

A patient, distressed by her prognosis of incurable cancer, has made multiple attempts at suicide. She tells her friends that she will try again, and they support her decision. When they do not hear from her for a few days, they ask her building's superintendent to check on her. The superintendent finds her still alive but barely breathing, and he calls 911. She is rushed to the hospital and put on a ventilator when she slips into a coma; doctors fear that she has suffered brain damage. She has an advance directive, and her health care power of attorney has asked the health care team to "finish" the suicide. Doctors have asked for an ethics consultation to consider what to do in this situation.

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central
Respect for autonomy	The health care agent feels the health care team should respect the patient's right to control how she dies.	
Professional responsibility	The doctors believe they have a professional responsibility to not participate in a patient's suicide.	√
Compassion	The doctors want to withdraw life-sustaining treatment out of compassion for the patient.	
Nonmaleficence	The doctors believe that keeping the patient on life support is wrong because they have a duty to "do no harm."	√

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Given that the doctors believe they have a professional responsibility to not participate in a patient's suicide, but the doctors also believe that keeping the patient on life support is wrong because they have a duty to "do no harm". . .

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- "Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?"
- "Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?"
- "What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?"

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Not applicable

Be prepared to state the ethics question.

Given that the doctors believe they have a professional responsibility to not participate in a patient's suicide, but the doctors also believe that keeping the patient on life support is wrong because they have a duty to "do no harm," what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

SCENARIO 5

A workgroup convened by the chief business officer developed a new hospital policy on advertising. During the approval process, leadership referred the policy for the Ethics Consultation Service for a document review.

Which values are creating uncertainty or conflict in the scenario?

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Not applicable—the requester did not identify an ethical concern.

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Be prepared to state your ethics question.

What ethical concerns are raised by the draft hospital policy on advertising and what should be done to resolve them?

PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

SCENARIO 6

A 53-year-old patient has been followed in the primary care clinic for the past 3 years for his back pain. He also has a history of occasional substance abuse (cocaine, marijuana, and alcohol). His primary care provider sent him to a pain specialist for evaluation. The pain specialist recommended exercises as well as long-acting and immediate-release opioids. However, the primary care doctor refused to prescribe the recommended medications because she could not “in good conscience” risk her license by prescribing opioids to a known substance abuser. The manager of the primary care clinic has requested an ethics consultation to assist with this case.

Values Label	Values Perspective	Central
Accountability	The primary care provider thinks it would be ethically problematic to prescribe opioids because she feels accountable for ensuring that the drugs she prescribes are not misused.	
Do no harm	The primary care provider feels that she should not prescribe opioids to a patient with a history of substance abuse because of her obligation to “do no harm” to patients.	✓
Compassion	According to the clinic manager, the patient should be treated out of compassion for his suffering.	✓
Duty	The provider believes that it is her legal duty as a licensed clinician to refuse access to opioids to substance abusers.	

State the ethical concern in the form: [central values perspective], but [central values perspective]:

Given that the primary care provider feels that she should not prescribe opioids to a patient with a history of substance abuse because of her obligation to “do no harm” to patients but, according to the clinic manager, the patient should be treated out of compassion for his suffering. . .

Circle the appropriate form for the ethics question:

- “Given that [ethical concern], what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?”
- “Given that [ethical concern], is it ethically justifiable to [decision or action]?”
- “What ethical concerns are raised by [name of document], and what should be done to resolve them?”

If the second form is selected, what is the decision or action?

Not applicable

Be prepared to state the ethics question.

Given that the primary care provider feels that she should not prescribe opioids to a patient with a history of substance abuse because of her obligation to “do no harm” to patients but, according to the clinic manager, the patient should be treated out of compassion for his suffering, what decisions or actions are ethically justifiable?